

Although Congress was back in session for scarcely more than a day last week, private citizens across the country managed to cause an uproar felt across Capitol Hill. The uproar took the form of hundreds of thousands of phone calls to both Senators and Representatives, urging them to oppose two draconian new bills that threaten the free and unbridled flow of information on the internet.

On Wednesday last week, dozens of prominent websites like Wikipedia, Reddit, and Craigslist, were blacked out in protest of two bills known in DC jargon as SOPA and PIPA. SOPA is the House bill; PIPA is its Senate companion. These bills ostensibly will combat internet piracy, and of course we also are told they will help us wage the never ending "war on terror."

What these bills actually do is force website owners to police the internet; create entry barriers to the only relatively free and open medium of communication; and threaten to break the technological structure of the internet itself. They also violate our 1st Amendment right to freedom of speech and our 4th Amendment freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures.

SOPA and PIPA have been drafted not only without respect for the Constitution, but also without an understanding of the how the internet works. These bills attack the very system upon which the entire orderly organization of the web depends. Search engines, internet service providers, advertising sites, and sites with user-generated content such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter--all magnificent creations of the market-- are directly threatened by these bills. They will be held responsible if even a single of their millions of users posts even one link to a website that a copyright holder claims is violating a copyright.

Note that under the bills as written, the Department of Justice or a copyright holder do not have to prove that their copyright was violated-- they simply have to claim copyright infringement and an entire site is shut down. The burden of these regulations on the internet will be enormous, shifting resources away from productivity and innovation and into monitoring and censoring. It turns internet companies into involuntary tools for Big Brother government, further eroding our Constitutional rights.

As is typical of so many bills in Congress, SOPA and PIPA were not crafted to make life better for the American people, but rather were written at the behest of big business trying to enlist the federal government as its strong-arm. For example, the Motion Picture Association of America spent more than \$1.2 million so far lobbying for their passage.

But the internet community is fighting back effectively, not just with websites that went black but with millions of users who expressed their solidarity. Congressional sponsors of both bills have been jumping ship in response to the outrage. The House Judiciary Committee canceled the SOPA hearing they were planning to hold last Wednesday; the House leadership announced they have no intention of considering this bill; and at the end of the week Senator Reid announced he was postponing the vote until a "compromise" could be reached. The American people are speaking, and with their continued grassroots efforts the marketplace for free ideas and communication will prevail over government controls and censorship.